

Biblical Fasting

Introduction

The way fasting is taught in Christianity today is that by purposely abstaining from food and instead devoting oneself to prayer, praise, and meditation, one's spirit is strengthened, that one's relationship with God is deepened, that "strongholds" of the mind are broken, or in order to have God hear and answer a specific prayer.

On the surface, this sounds great. Who wouldn't want these things? The question is not, does prayer and meditation on God's Word produce growth, the question addressed here is, does abstaining from food somehow add to the benefit? Is there some spiritual power activated by fasting?

While fasting may definitely have certain benefits in regards to physical health, to attribute a certain spiritual benefit to the practice of fasting that the Bible never describes is to invent a practice according to your imagination.

Let me say at the outset, we all, as sons and daughters, have liberty in Christ—God delivered us from the tutors and governors of the Law that we might be personally exercised unto godliness through wisdom and understanding in our own walks.

Therefore, it's not my intention to tell anyone what they should or should not do. All I aim to do through this study is provide an *accurate report* of how the Bible portrays and describes fasting. What one chooses to do with this information is a decision they themselves are responsible for, and whatever that may be, God is not going to look either more or less favorably upon you for it.

Contents

We will break this study down into 4 basic sections:

1. Foundation: Purposes for fasting Biblically
 2. Objections: dealing with unique passages
 3. Doctrinal implications for the BOC
 4. Conclusion
-

1

Foundation: Purposes for fasting Biblically

In a *chronological theology*, we allow what is revealed *first* to inform us of how to think about specific subjects later on. We do not come to the text and inject our ideas into it—we allow what God has said previously to tell us how we should regard a subject. In this way, we substantially reduce the phenomenon of private interpretation and the inventing of ideas.

In this case, we look first at how fasting is portrayed in the Old Testament. This will provide a framework by which we should understand what fasting is.

In the second section, we will then consider the unique passages of the New Testament in regards to fasting, in light of what we've learned from the Old Testament.

Purposes For Fasting

- To comply with Old Testament Law and Holy Days (Leviticus 16:29; see Isaiah 58:3 for a definition of “afflict your soul”).
- To “afflicting your soul” as an act of repentance for your sins in order to avoid judgment (2 Sam. 12:16-23, 1 Kings 21:19-29).
- As an act of repentance to have prayers heard (Jer. 14:12).
- As an act of repentance to receive blessing and/or deliverance (Joel 2:12-18).
- As an act of national repentance (Judges 20:26, 1 Sam. 7:3-6, 2 Chron. 20:1-4, Ezra 8:21, Dan. 9:2-19).
- To commemorate events in Israel's history (see Zech. 8:19). The fast of the fourth month commemorates when the city of Jerusalem was broken up (see Jeremiah 52:6-7). The fast of the fifth month was when the temple and houses were burned (see Jer. 52:12-13). The fast of the seventh is in remembrance of when Gedaliah was killed by Ishmael (see Jer. 40:8, 41:1-3, 15-18). The fast of the tenth month is in remembrance of when the King of Babylon turned against Jerusalem (Ezekiel 24:1-2).

2

Objections: dealing with unique passages

Doesn't fasting “break the yoke” of mental and spiritual strongholds?”

Proof text: Isaiah 58:1-7

Solution:

This passage is God expressing His desire for the Israelites to actually execute justice and mercy, *rather* than commit sin *and then* afflict themselves for their sins *afterwards*. *To obey*, the prophet Samuel said to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:22, *is better than sacrifice*.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6

This is the only passage that discusses pulling down strongholds of the mind, and fasting is not even mentioned. What is mentioned is casting down imaginations and things that exalt themselves *against the knowledge* of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty *through God*. Where do we read of weapons and armor? We read about these in Ephesians 6, verses 14 through 17, in which the shield is a shield of faith, and the sword is the sword of the Spirit which is *the Word of God*.

Didn't Jesus instruct His disciples to fast?

Consider **Mark 2:18-20** and **Matthew 9:15**; one of these passages uses the word "fast" (Mark 2), while the other parallel account says "mourn" (Matt. 9).

We see here that fasting was understood to be synonymous with mourning. Just as we saw from the Old Testament, fasting always took place in the context of mourning for one's sins in repentance.

Mark 2:18 shows clearly that Jesus' disciples did *not* fast during their 3.5 year ministry with Jesus. Why? The fast that is alluded to when the bridegroom leaves is a fast of mourning, and is an allusion to the national repentance of Israel in the Day of the LORD. We see this fast spoken of in **Joel 2:12-18**. This same time of repentance and mourning at the end of the tribulation is described in **Zechariah 12:9-14**.

Matthew 6:16-18

This passage instructs the disciples to not fast as hypocrites, who make it apparent they are fasting to seem outwardly pious, but instead to wash their face, and anoint their head, that they might fast in secret to God and not in appearance to men.

This instruction is given in the context of the “sermon on the mount,” which is a sermon to the believing remnant of Israel to prepare them for the time of wrath that they must go through before entering into the promised kingdom.

Jesus instructs them to not worry about food, for the Father will feed them (**v26**); and yet Paul instructs us in the Body of Christ that if a man will not work he shouldn’t eat (**2 Thessalonians 3:10**). They are in fact instructed to pray for their daily bread. This calls the Jewish audiences minds back to God providing manna in the wilderness, and that is precisely the idea they are meant to have, because in the tribulation, they will not be able to buy, sell, or trade unless they take the mark of the beast, or his name or the number of his name, and will be lead out of apostate Jerusalem into the wilderness where God will again provide for them. We see this specifically mentioned in **Revelation 12:6**.

The sermon on the Mount is a sermon that is meant to be understood in the historical context in which it is given, namely, that after Messiah is cut off, according to the prophecy of Daniel 9, there are only 7 more years until Christ returns to set up His kingdom on earth.

This means these instructions are for the Hebrews who will have to go through this time of tribulation. Jesus instructs them to uphold and teach the Law of Moses, if they are to be called great in the kingdom of heaven (**Matt. 5:17-19**), and yet Paul tells the church in no uncertain terms we are not under the Law but under grace (**Rom. 6:14**). In fact, Colossians 2:16 instructs us to let no man judge us in regards to the Law (meats, drink, sabbaths, or holy days).

Even the so called “Lord’s prayer” is meant to be understood in the context of the end times—*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread... lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...*

This audience is looking forward to the kingdom *come to earth*; *the meek*, Matthew 5:5 says, shall inherit *the earth*.

We are looking for the *blessed hope*, where we will be *caught up*, and in like manner ever be with the Lord (Titus 2:13, 1 Thess. 4:17). Paul specifically says the Lord will preserve him to His heavenly kingdom (2 Timothy 4:18). We are not anticipating the earthly kingdom.

And so when Jesus instructs his disciples to wash their faces and anoint their heads when they fast, again what’s being alluded to here is the future fast in the time of the tribulation, and the national fast of repentance in the Day of the Lord previously spoken of.

We have seen that the Pharisees observed and stated plainly that Jesus’s disciples *didn’t* fast during their ministry before the cross—and so what’s being alluded to here is yet *future*.

But, didn't Jesus fast?

Jesus is recorded as having fasted for 40 days and nights in the wilderness. This is in the immediate context of Jesus being baptized by John, and the first of three pronouncements by the Father that Jesus was His beloved Son: it is immediately after this pronouncement that Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness *to be tempted by the devil*.

Jehovah, from Israel's deliverance from Egypt, was trying to teach them to trust in Him over their flesh and over their five senses, and esteem His Words above all else:

Deuteronomy 8:1-5

¹ *All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers.*

² *And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.*

³ *And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.*

⁴ *Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.*

⁵ *Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee.*

We see here that, just as Israel, God's firstborn son (Ex. 4:22), was tested in the wilderness, Jesus, having been pronounced the beloved Son, was led into the wilderness to be tempted.

Jesus, as fulfilling the role of Israel, as He had to be fully identified with Israel, was led into the wilderness 40 days, a parallel to Israel's 40 years. When tempted by Satan, He demonstrated the lesson that Israel was supposed to learn, and quotes Deuteronomy back to Satan:

Matthew 4:1-4

¹ *Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*

² *And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.*

³ *And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*

⁴ *But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

Jesus fasted 40 days in order to be fully identified with the nation of Israel, that He might overcome and fulfill all righteousness, that He might, as **Hebrews 4:15** says, be tempted in all points, and yet be without sin:

Hebrews 4:15

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Consider also **Hebrews 2**, verses 9 through 18. Jesus was perfected through sufferings, and tempted, that He might be able to help those who must endure temptation. In this we see He is able to identify with us, and in the context of Hebrews, specifically with the believing remnant of Israel in the tribulation.

Jesus, when He was baptized, was not baptized as a pattern for the Body of Christ, but to fulfill all righteousness according to **Matthew 3:15**. John the Baptist specifically says he came baptizing with water that the Messiah would be made manifest to Israel (**John 1:31**).

Jesus was baptized that He might be revealed to Israel as the Messiah, and be fully *identified* with Israel.

Matthew 4:1 specifically says Jesus went out into the wilderness to be *tempted by the devil*. There is nothing in this passage whatsoever that says He was fasting in order to unlock some spiritual power. That idea *must be inserted into the text*.

If fasting indeed unlocked some spiritual power, why wouldn't there be clear passages that speak to this? There is not one passage that speaks to abstaining from food as a way to strengthen the inner man. That is always said to be accomplished by faith in the Word of God.

What about casting out devils?

Matthew 17:19-21

The prayer and fasting here is meant to be understood in the context of "afflicting your soul," or repentance. It is not the abstaining from food that is central to the idea of the prayer and fasting in this verse, but the idea that it carries with it, namely *repentance*.

Another thing to consider is that Jesus tells the disciples they could not cast out the devil because of *their unbelief*. He then says, *nevertheless*. And so, that being said, this kind of devil requires repentance—prayer and fasting. Who's repentance is Jesus referring to? It isn't the disciple's repentance, as the reason they couldn't cast it out was due to unbelief. They needed not repent in any case—they *were* following Jesus. This is speaking to repentance of the son afflicted by the devil.

Remember also that this verse takes place prior to the cross, prior to the dispensation of grace, and thus, prior to the formation of the Body of Christ. The boy afflicted with the devil is not

someone sealed with the Holy Ghost until the day of redemption, and neither are the disciples. This passage is entirely Old Testament in nature and thus, even in the most hypothetical of narratives one could create, what is occurring there is not what is occurring today in the Church.

But, didn't Paul speak of fasting?

1 Corinthians 7:5

This passage mentions in passing a consensual time of prayer and fasting in the context of temporary abstinence in marriage, but it must be understood that 1 Corinthians is an epistle written to a congregation that had a large Jewish audience, some of whom were still married to non-believing Jews. And so of course we find this passage that mentions fasting in the same chapter that deals with believers being married to non believers.

Understanding the large Jewish population of the Corinthian church gives additional context to the instructions given on a believers duty in marriage to an unbeliever in **1 Corinthians 7:12-16**; this gives additional context to *dietary restrictions* and *things sacrificed to idols* in chapters 8 and 10, since, to the unbelieving Jews or those "weak in the faith," certain foods and foods sacrificed to idols would naturally be a stumbling block, whereas to the newly saved gentile, they understand perfectly well now that there is only One True God, and that "an idol is nothing in the world" (1 Cor. 8:4).

The Jewish element of this church adds context to Paul's reference to Christ as our *Passover*, which he does in no other epistle. This is why he will say in chapter ten, verse 1, that *all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea*, a reference to the Israelites who came out of Egypt. He says, as an Israelite, *all our fathers*. We are connected to *Abraham* by faith, but never are we the Body of Christ connected to "the fathers" in this sense.

We see in **Acts 18:1-11**, that Paul, after testifying in the synagogue, was taken in by a man named Justus, who's "house was joined hard to the synagogue." This means his house was *physically* joined to the synagogue as part of the same building. Acts 18 recounts that Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord, along with all his house, and many of the Corinthians believed (v8). It is possible that one of the Corinthian assemblies met in Justus's house; in any case, it is clear there was a considerable Jewish population of believers in the Corinthian church.

Understanding that the Corinthian church had a mixed Jew and gentile audience, and that some of these Jewish believers were still married to unbelievers, helps us understand the nuance in the doctrines dealt therein. A religious Jew, who was not saved, likely still partook of occasional times of fasting and prayer. Even today, Jews still engage in these practices.

The context however of 1 Corinthians 7:5 is not fasting, but actually marital duties that partners are to render to one another. They were only to defraud one another for a time for the sake of prayer and fasting.

This passage is the closest we have in the Pauline epistles to an actual instruction *for* fasting, and it is tucked away in an epistle to a largely carnal congregation that was dealing with a wide variety of issues, not the least of which was relations between newly saved Jews who were still married to unsaved religious Jews.

Keep in mind there is no clear teaching on fasting as a means to attain spiritual maturity, strength, etc...

In all of the teaching, doctrine, and instruction that we are given in Paul's epistles, *as well as in the Hebrew epistles* of Hebrews through Revelation chapter 3, there is not one clear instruction on this subject, and in fact the Hebrew epistles don't even mention it in passing. The only instruction given to the Hebrew remnant is given in the early gospels, the instance of which we have already looked at and which relates to their time of national repentance in the Day of the Lord.

I also want us to understand that Paul doesn't instruct them *not* to fast—this is because of the principles we are to operate under in our *liberty*, namely, wisdom, judgment, justice, and equity. We are to consider one another and esteem's others above ourselves. This has direct bearing on a believer who is still married to an unbelieving religious Jew. These principles are to be applied in our daily lives such that one considers the dynamics at work in any given situation and chooses those things which best edify the other party unto godliness; liberty should never be flaunted and used as a stumbling block, but rather, for edification.

This is the essence of **1 Corinthians 10:23-24**:

²³ *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.*

²⁴ *Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.*

One of the main themes of 1 Corinthians is that the Corinthians, realizing their liberty in Christ, were *abusing* liberty, and missing the bigger picture that liberty is the freedom, not to do whatever you want to do, but the freedom to do what will edify others—*freedom to do what is right*.

In speaking of spiritual gifts, Paul says in **1 Corinthians 14:26**,

How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying

All things are to be done for the sake of benefiting *others*. In the context of eating things sacrificed to idols, Paul says in **1 Corinthians 8:8**,

But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

If eating something that was sacrificed to an idol doesn't change our status before God, then how would *not eating anything at all* be any different? Look how Paul follows up verse 8:

1 Corinthians 8:9

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

The issue is conscience, both yours and anothers. This becomes clear from reading chapters 8-10. The issues of liberty, conscience, and edifying are at the heart of the issues discussed in 1 Corinthians; thus, when we see this passage about spouses allowing for periods of abstinence for the sake of prayer and fasting, we must see it through this lens. If anyone felt they needed to fast according to their conscience, *I am in no position to tell them they are wrong*.

Paul, though he never gives clear doctrine or instructions regarding fasting, does however, when instructing pastors, say this in **1 Timothy 4**:

⁸ *For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

Bodily exercise here is referring to physical disciplines, such as religious observances; he says they profit *little*.

Let's continue looking at some statement in **1 Timothy 4**:

¹³ *Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.*

The clear command here is to teach and exhort with the Word of God.

¹⁵ *Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.*

The Word of God is what *is* going to *profit*, in contrast to bodily “exercise,” or religion.

To Paul, *understanding* the Word of God and allowing it to work *in you* was the primary issue:

1 Corinthians 14:19

Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

1 Timothy 1:3-4

³ *As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine,*

⁴ *Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.*

We are to be taught and exhorted with doctrine, and through faith in the word of God, will be edified unto godliness.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

It is faith in the word of God that is going to effectually work in us.

And so again and again we see that the teaching and preaching of God’s Word is what is going to work in our inner man and profit us.

But, didn’t Paul say he fasted?

There are a few instances in the book of Acts where believers, including Paul, are said to fast. One thing to remember about the book of Acts however is it is not a book of doctrine, it is a historical account.

Paul also baptized believers in Corinth before receiving additional revelation from Christ that this wasn't something that was necessary for the Body of Christ; the Pauline epistles do not contain one instruction for water baptism, and it is the epistles which contain our stated doctrine.

We do not get our pattern from the historical account of Acts, as Acts is not trying to communicate doctrine, nor depict a pattern for us, as it is a historical account of the fall of Israel, while simultaneously authenticating the apostleship of Paul and validating his message. Remember also, the apostles were still having things revealed to them by Christ during this time—meaning they did not yet have all the information available to them that we now have. Paul had to go up to Jerusalem in Acts 15 to communicate his gospel to the other apostles *because they did not yet know it*. Paul also continued to receive revelation from Jesus.

In **2 Corinthians 12:1**, Paul says,

I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

One case of Paul fasting is in Acts 13, when Paul and Barnabas are set aside by the Holy Ghost for an apostleship to the gentiles (see **Acts 13:2-3**). When considering this passage, it appears they are indeed fasting and praying for some type of direction. Remember, Paul had already received a mission statement from Jesus directly as recounted by Paul **Acts 26:14-18**. And so, Paul and Barnabas are living in a period of *transition*, in a unique period of apostolic history, where the apostles were laying foundations for the church. They *required* direction from Christ. *They had no written epistles or scripture as yet in regards to what was going on*. We however today have a *clearly stated message, mission, manner of life and work of faith* described for us in our epistles. These epistles clearly communicate doctrine for us and to us.

Again, wisdom says not to build theology, doctrine, or practice around unclear or obscure verses in the Bible. Build upon that which is clearly stated.

One other case of fasting and praying is **Acts 14:21-23**, where Paul and Barnabas, as apostles, ordained elders in the churches at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, perhaps taking the pattern of prayer before ordination from Jesus Himself who, after praying all night on a mountain, only then ordained twelve men to be apostles (Luke 6:12-13).

One thing to consider for our current state of affairs in the church is that we now have the pastoral epistles of 1 Timothy through Philemon, and in them are given specific qualifications and attributes that elders/bishops and deacons are to have. That is not to say that prayer doesn't have a place in appointing these offices, it of course does; fasting however would be more of a personal issue of conscience rather than necessity.

The word *fasting* does not always occur in the Bible in a religious context either. **Acts 27:33** is an instance of this, where Paul is prisoner aboard a Greek ship intended to sail to Italy, under a Roman centurion named Julius. In this instance, they fall upon hard weather for a prolonged duration, and Paul tells the nonreligious Gentiles who are commanding the ship,

...This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

(v33b-34)

The word fasting here is *asitos* in Greek, and simply means to refrain from eating food. The Greek word *nesteuo* means also to abstain from food, but sometimes carries a religious connotation. Similarly, the Greek word *nesteia*, which means *abstinence*, is used sometimes in reference to religiously abstaining from food, as in the case of Acts 14:23.

Some of Paul's own "fastings" which are mentioned in passing do not necessarily appear voluntary in the sense of religious fasting, but are found in the context of the sufferings that accompanied the ministry:

2 Corinthians 6:3-5

³ *Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:*

⁴ *But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,*

⁵ *In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings...*

2 Cor. 11:23-27

²³ *Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.*

²⁴ *Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.*

²⁵ *Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;*

²⁶ *In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;*

²⁷ *In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

In recounting the number of things Paul had to endure for the sake of the ministry, he includes "fastings." In the case of 2 Corinthians 11, he includes *fastings* after specifically saying *in hunger*

and thirst, and so we cannot be sure if in this context he is trying to discriminate fastings themselves from hunger and thirst or not.

In any case, the point of both of these passages are the labors and sufferings that demonstrate and “approve” Paul as a legitimate minister of Christ, as opposed to the false ministers he mentions in chapter 11. Again, fasting is only mentioned in passing here.

The doctrine given to us through Paul’s epistles will make it so that we know how both to abound, and to be abased—that is, even in sufferings such as hunger, we are able to endure unto the glory of God (see Philippians 4:11-13).

To speak somewhat ironically, Paul *does* tell us to stand *fast* in the faith (1 Cor. 16:13), stand *fast* in the liberty (Gal. 5:1), stand *fast* in one spirit (Phil. 1:27), stand *fast* in the Lord (Phil. 4:1, 1 Thess. 3:8), to prove all things and hold *fast* that which is good (1 Thess. 5:21), to stand *fast* and hold the traditions taught to us by the epistles (2 Thess. 2:15), to hold fast the form of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13), and for bishops to hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught (Titus 1:9). These are the ways in which this word *fast* is usually employed in our epistles and these are imperatives, that is, these are *clear commands*.

3

Doctrinal implications for the BOC

In Colossians 2, we are warned against the traditions of men, *and* against the idea that physical things or disciplines of the flesh can somehow add to what Christ has already done for us.

We learn in Romans the all sufficiency of what Christ has provided for us in our justification and sanctification; we also learn of our death to the Law and any performance based system; we learn of our liberty in Christ and our freedom from days, observances, and dietary restrictions. Christ has provided something far more excellent than these carnal prescriptions can—He has provided a real father-son relationship for us with God, so that we need not any prescribed method to appease Him. We are accepted in the beloved.

The book of Colossians exhorts us to continue in Christ just as we began—*by faith*.

Colossians 2:8

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Colossians 2:20-23

²⁰ *Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,*

²¹ *(Touch not; taste not; handle not;*

²² *Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?*

²³ *Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.*

The neglecting of the body has a *show* of wisdom, Colossians says, but does not actually carry any honor with it, as it is still a satisfying of the flesh.

This passage says that we must be rooted and built up and stablished in *the faith*. Faith in the word of God is what is going to ground us and build us up.

Consider what Paul says to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus before he departed to Jerusalem:

Acts 20:32

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

It is faith in the Word of God that works in us to perform the work in our inner man that God desires to perform, namely, to conform us to the image of Christ. *The words are spiritual*—food, not so much.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

When we consider the purposes fasting, and compare them with the doctrine we've been given today as the Body of Christ, we see there is actually no practical reason for fasting:

- We are already delivered from God's wrath (Rom. 5:9, 1 Thess. 1:10, 1 Thess. 5:9)
- We are not under any obligation to observe days such as Holy days or feast days (Rom. 14:5-6, Gal. 4:9-11, Col. 2:16)
- Not only does God always hear our prayers, but the Holy Ghost and Christ Himself are also interceding for us, ensuring communication between us and the Father, when we don't know what to pray for as we ought (Rom. 8:26-27, 34)
- We have already been blessed with *all* spiritual blessings, are predestinated to the adoption, and are accepted in the Beloved (Eph. 1:3-6)
- We do not need to "repent" nationally, or even individually, seeing we have already repented in turning our minds to Christ and trusting the gospel (Acts 20:20-21). We have already been forgiven *all trespasses* (Col. 2:13)

4 Conclusion

When examining the issue of fasting in the light of the words of scripture, the picture we get is somewhat different than what is portrayed in our modern Christian culture.

Israel was under the tutors and governors of the Law, and the reasons they fasted had direct correlation to their Old Testament religion and covenant.

Israel, under the Law, are likened to children in Galatians 2. We however today are not under the tutors and governors of the Law, and are not children, but sons and daughters in the sense of adult heirs.

It appears that the Biblical perception of fasting, its purposes and uses, has been somewhat eclipsed, however subtly, by undertones of eastern mysticism, especially in the more charismatic Christian traditions.

Are there mental and physical benefits to fasting? Of course there are. Can this potentially benefit some individuals in certain cases? Absolutely. Are we specifically told not to fast? No we aren't.

But what we must understand is that what many Christians are aiming to accomplish *by* fasting is something God the Father has *already freely given to them by Jesus Christ*.

Fasting to hear God's voice better is an exercise in futility when He has given you an *entire book of words that He inspired, that you then choose to ignore*.

False religions fast too...

The concept of fasting is one of denying physical needs of the body for spiritual gains.

- Sunita Shah, *Why do Hindus fast?*
from *The JaiJais*, Aug. 24, 2021

Now, she, as a practicing Hindu, who by all ostensible accounts does not believe in Jesus Christ as Lord, nor accepts His provision for sin and eternal life in the gospel, says the purpose of fasting for her is for *spiritual gains*. Let me ask a question, *is she even spiritually alive?* Or is she *dead in trespasses and sins* according to the Scripture?

We must stop conflating mental benefits or experiences with that of *true spirituality*. We have seen the Bible *never, not even once*, depicts fasting as a means of "spiritual gains," except in the context of repentance *from sin and towards God*. Where does the power actually lie? Is it in not eating food, or does it lie in *the repentance*?

Are we relying on the life and power of Christ to be made manifest in and through us? Or are we propping ourselves up by ascetic practices that rely on the flesh?

The following is from **dwf.com**, April 27th, 2022, written by Aisha Saeed:

"Fasting during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam, and therefore Muslims fast as an act of worship, but also to bring them closer to Allah (God) and a way to become considerate to those in need.

Personally for me, I found it helped me re-charge my mind and body, not just in the form of a detox but also makes me take time out to focus on improving habits that I strive to continue once the month is over. For example, looking out for one another, controlling anger and the duty of kindness. It also made me re-evaluate what is important in life - making me appreciate things we usually take for granted i.e. having the means to make a meal and a roof over our head.

During this time, I particularly remember those who are in a less fortunate position (who will not know where their next meal will come from), and it makes me more conscious to not overindulge when breaking our fast and to also want to give more to those who are in need. Although charity is given all year round, the month of Ramadan brings further generosity within the community as charitable donations increase from all Muslims around the world to help the poor and needy.”